

OCTOBER 27, 2015

STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING CERTIFICATES OF APPROPRIATENESS FOR MARBLE COLLEGIATE CHURCH, 1 WEST 29TH STREET AND A REPORT TO THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION PURSUANT TO SECTION 74-111 OF THE ZONING RESOLUTION REGARDING MARBLE COLLEGIATE CHURCH AND GILSEY HOUSE, 1200 BROADWAY

Good day Chair Srinivasan and Commissioners. I am Ann Friedman speaking on behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Conservancy's Public Policy Committee has reviewed this proposal and thanks the architect and project team for their presentation.

This complicated proposal involves work on a half dozen buildings stretching across a full City block, and will dramatically change that block. While only two of the buildings are designated landmarks, and the LPC's purview limited, we hope that the Commission will take the full effect of this project under consideration.

We believe that the restoration work on the individual landmarks, Marble Collegiate Church and Gilsey House, will enhance these buildings. As we have not seen the details of maintenance funds required by Section 74-711, we hope that the Commission will be monitoring their establishment.

We have a concern about the rebuilding of the western elevation of Marble Collegiate Church so as to match the look of the new development. The church is an historic urban building and was not designed to face a public space at the rear. Now that a public garden is proposed, it would be more appropriate to clad the new church façade in brick rather than in white limestone. While we find the design of the new façade to be appropriate, we believe that executing it in brick would be more in keeping with the traditional historic character of a secondary façade.

The new structures along 29th Street are not strictly under review by LPC, but we hope that they would be more finely articulated than the version we saw, which appeared somewhat monolithic, and not in keeping with the dynamic mix of buildings in this neighborhood.

On the issue of the harmonious relationship between the landmarks and the new tower, we appreciate the gesture of moving the building toward 30th Street so that it does not compete with vistas of the church. The design is reminiscent of Mr. Safdie's works around the world, and many of our Committee members hope that there would be a place for such a building in New York, but are not convinced that this is the right location. The height of the base meets the roofline of its neighbor, but is otherwise fairly bland. The materials and details of the tower are incompatible with the largely masonry and cast iron buildings of the block. The excessive height of the tower overwhelms the adjacent historic buildings including the church.

In acquiring several parcels and deftly utilizing the zoning code, the developers have an opportunity to reshape this block and this neighborhood. They are following the letter of the code, but we hope that they will reconsider some elements of the project and adhere more closely to the spirit of the code: to protect and enhance landmarks.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Conservancy's views.